



Laura Juarez, clutching a container of Chinese food, her sole diet, has lived under a tree in downtown Los Angeles for more than a year.

What Can Be Done About Laura Juarez?

The Mysterious Bag Lady of 4th Street Typifies Plight of Downtown's Homeless

By WILLIAM OVEREND, Times Staff Writer

She is an old woman who has lived under a small sycamore tree on a sidewalk in downtown Los Angeles for more than a year.

Her clothes are filthy, her ankles are black and painfully swollen, and she has no teeth. Day after day, she huddles in the same spot against a pile of trash bags that hold her few possessions.

It is a mystery to many why she lives this way and who she might be and what should be done about her.

The concern is not confined to her, but extends to the growing number of homeless men and women on the city streets.

Tried to Help

Some have tried to help her. She either looks away in silence until they leave or screams to drive them off.

"If that were my mother or my sister, I wouldn't want her living that way," says Jill Halverson, the founder of a center for homeless women in the downtown area.

But because she doesn't want to be helped, there is little they can do for her, the authorities respond.

"She has chosen to live like this," says Los Angeles Police Department Detective Walt de Cuir. "I think we should respect her life style."

She says her name is Laura Juarez and that she is a 64-year-old Apache Indian from Phoenix.

But there is even some cause to question that, and her identity is where the mystery begins.

Search for Origins

The search for answers leads first to Arizona and the Apache tribes in a hunt for the origins she claims.

It focuses at a later point on a nursing home in the San Gabriel Valley where she once resided.

Finally, it swings back again to the sidewalk home she has staked out under her downtown tree.

She remains there with her heap of trash bags while others continue the debate on what to do.

And as long as she stays there, the mystery remains unsolved.

In the mornings, as the rush hour Please see BAG LADY, Page 16

Extra, Extra! Get Your Old News Here

By DAVE LARSEN, Times Staff Writer

There are certain things that are finite resources.

There is only so much oil in the ground.

There is only so much gold that can be mined.

There are only so many copies of each paper printed by any newspaper on any given day.

And as libraries, universities, historical societies and the newspapers themselves have switched to storing the various editions on microfilm, the actual hard copies have become an endangered species.

It is one thing to stare at the projection of a negative, but there is a certain thrill to have in one's hands a real printed copy proclaiming that Lindbergh flew across the Atlantic, or that San Francisco was devastated by an earthquake, turned out by a press that very day or the next one.

Warehouse of Treasures

In a warehouse south of Compton is what amounts to the Mother Lode of such treasures, what its owners said are more than 700,000 authentic hard copies of newspapers—from 15 major cities and going back in some cases to the days of the Civil War.

Why and how they got there is a story that Christian Berglas can best tell himself:

"Until a year ago, I had been a dealer in antique maps and antique scientific instruments. I had a place called Private Collections.

"Then one day I was in the home of a man who collected old newspapers. He had them stacked in his living room, in his basement, in his garage—more than 15,000 copies.

"Don't ask me why, but I made him an offer of maps and money for the entire collection, and he agreed."

It was the first time Berglas owned a newspaper older than yesterday's.

The map and instrument business exists no more. Having taken its place is an unusual outfit begun this year and called The Authentic See NEWSPAPERS, Page 12

Ancient Customs Carried On

Ethnic Weddings Still Flaunt Their Roots

By TIA GINDICK, Times Staff Writer

In the end, it's about commitment and the bonding of one person to another.

But in the beginning:

—Getting married can take up to two weeks for Indian couples. Among the rituals: purification of the bride by a priest, after which henna is used to paint an intricate design on the hands of both bride and bridegroom; the brother-in-law's presentation of 15 to 21 thin ivory bangles that the bride will wear for the first year of her marriage; the bride removing what seems to be pounds of gold jewelry given by her family from her neck, arms and ankles and replacing it with at least as much jewelry from the bridegroom's family. And still to come, the actual Hindu wedding ceremony around a small fire.

—If both sets of parents don't come to terms during a dialogue called the *pantun*, an Indonesian couple might as well cancel the marriage. These days, most parents do—but some will hold out for two or

three hours, prompting a great sigh of relief from friends and relatives who have come in for the Muslim wedding ceremony.

—A South African black man would never propose directly. Instead he'd have an uncle or aunt intercede for him. If the girl's parents agreed, then a wedding date would be set and a dowry determined (which the bride would use to buy dishes and household items). Ten days before the wedding, the bridegroom's uncles deliver the dowry, which the bride's uncles accept.

A Singing Competition

Not the parents, because, says South African singer Letta Mbulu, "It's known that parents can get very funny about their children." Meanwhile, friends of each family have been rehearsing tribal songs and on the day of the wedding, there's a brief traditional Christian ceremony in a church—then back to the

bride's house for a feast and singing competition that goes on and on and on.

Some things never change. Not with time. Nor with immigration to the United States. Indeed, many American ethnic groups are at their most ethnic when there's a wedding. And some people whose ethnic roots have become blurred (or don't seem too exciting) have been known to adapt another nationality's customs for their own weddings.

What's the appeal? At its most basic, ethnic weddings seem more fun, more interesting than what can only be called the "average American wedding." Says Fran Kucia, a second-generation Polish-American who runs an auto supply shop in Oxnard: "Other nationalities love the hospitality that comes with the ethnic wedding. It's a melding of Americans. There are no strangers at an ethnic wedding."

Actually, the religious ceremony is Please see WEDDINGS, Page 20



JAN DRYDEN / Los Angeles Times

Amid Ritual, Color, a Bond Is Created

Time-sanctioned ritual remains an important element of the wedding days of many ethnic couples in Southern California. At top, Hilda Guerrero Ruiz cups her hands to receive small gold coins during her wedding to Jesus Ramirez Ovalle. At right, Father George Venetos officiates at a Greek Orthodox ceremony uniting Marie and Chris Kokenis.



MARSHA TRABGER

Jack Smith

In its October issue Los Angeles magazine devotes its book section to quotations from several Los Angeles writers on their favorite books about Los Angeles.

I find the piece of more than passing interest because it is good to be reminded that there are books about Los Angeles, and because I happen to be one of the writers quoted. No matter how many times a person has seen his name in print, it still leaps out of the grayness of a page like a headline.

I had forgotten that the magazine's Sally Goll had phoned me one day and popped the question: "What is your favorite book about L.A.?"

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Caught unprepared, with no time to scan my bookshelves or even my memory, I answered, in part, as follows: "The odd thing is that Los Angeles hasn't been used as the subject of a book so much as a backdrop. Especially in all of those Beverly Hills and Hollywood books, filled with sex and money."

"... Los Angeles seems to serve as an obligatory page (or) chapter in all the international jet-set and intrigue. They go to Madrid and Rome and Cairo—and always come to Los Angeles just to say how bad it is."

"I do think Raymond Chandler captures the spirit of Los Angeles in a way that no other writer has. Even though the era that Chandler wrote about is gone, he still excites a nostalgic feeling."

Like anyone who sees his ad-libs quoted, I wish I'd had a chance to tidy up my grammar, diction and syntax,

and perhaps to come up with a different answer altogether.

I was gratified, though, that two admired friends of mine, Bill Stout, the conscience of KNXT-TV, and Ray Bradbury, our benign volcano, both put Raymond Chandler before all the rest, as I did.

Stout said: "I'd fall back on Raymond Chandler. He really captures the flavor of L.A., of Southern California. ... He (wrote) in the '30s and '40s. It is amazing

affection and melancholy, in prose as good as any in America.

In a preface to "The Raymond Chandler Omnibus," Lawrence Clark Powell observed that Chandler had "absolute control" over his setting. "(He) wrote with classical dispassion of a romantic and violent society. He was neither for nor against L.A.; his vision was not dazzled by the neons which rainbow the Southern California night. He had the X-ray eyes that penetrate

Of all the writers, Raymond Chandler had the book on Los Angeles

how much things are vastly different, yet remarkably the same. If you've read Chandler, you know—his descriptions of the streets, the time of day, the seasons—that's writing that captures the spirit of Los Angeles."

Bradbury said: "The novels of Raymond Chandler, of course. The atmosphere he portrays is really right on. I used to live down on Temple near Figueroa in the old days—near the Bunker Hill area—with the Spanish parlors. His evocation of Los Angeles is really on the nose—it's so right. For me, that's what makes Chandler so memorable."

Of the 16 writers quoted, Stout, Bradbury and I were the only ones who named Chandler. Perhaps we are moved less by literary judgment than by nostalgia. We are all three of the era Chandler wrote about with such

blacktop and fog. ... He had the gift of tongue; he was a poet. Metaphors flowered for him in language utterly suited to the exotic people and places he was describing with Flaubertian meticulousness. Chandler didn't moralize, satirize, deplore or lament; he saw, selected, and said, in language that lives. ...

Perhaps Chandler makes dull reading today. His hero, Philip Marlowe, like Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade, was a tough but honorable private eye—a Galahad in a tweed suit and gray fedora—who might drink on his clients' time and money, but rarely if ever did he go to bed with any of the desirable and willing women who got in his way.

Chandler's best disciple, the late Ross Macdonald, not only wrote and plotted much like Chandler, but also denied his hero, Lew Archer, the pleasures of the flesh

as Chandler had denied them to Marlowe. It was not until both authors' powers had declined, and presumably their heroes' had too, that Archer and Marlowe were allowed to be seduced; and then these long-delayed adventures seemed somehow disappointing, as if both the authors and their heroes were a bit embarrassed.

In the UCLA library the other day I was scanning a collection of letters between Chandler and a younger writer of private-eye novels, James M. Fox, and came across this sentiment in a letter Fox wrote after reading Chandler's next-to-last book, "The Long Goodbye."

"I must report immense relief at Marlowe finally being allowed to sleep with one of his women. (I foresee) enthusiasm by an audience reluctantly reconciled to what may have been a slight excess of self-denial in your hero in the past. ...

I too felt something like immense relief when I read "The Long Goodbye"; but, alas, despite Marlowe's belated fulfillment, the book was far from Chandler's best.

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Today the best of Marlowe's inheritors—John D. MacDonald's McGee, Stephen Greenleaf's Tanner and Robert B. Parker's Spenser—make frequent therapeutic pit stops in the beds of various women, but this makes them none the less noble than Marlowe: The therapy is for the women.

It used to be that censors took the sex out of books. Maybe we Chandler fans would get more support if somebody went over his books and wrote some sex in.

I can't help wondering what would happen to Philip Marlowe if Judith Krantz or Jacqueline Briskin got their hands on him.